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SUBJECT: SLA/AW GENERAL COMMANDER REQUESTS REBEL UNIFICATION IN DARFUR

REF: A) KHARTOUM 487 B) KHARTOUM 649

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The General Commander of the rebel forces of Sudanese Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid (SLA/AW) Abdelgadir Abdelrahman (Gaddura) supports rebel unification efforts that occur within Darfur's "liberated areas," not in Libya. Assembled commanders reaffirmed their support for the work of Special Envoy Gration, but asked for U.S. assistance in returning all SLA/AW commanders from various locations in Chad to the field. Commanders reported that Gaddura asked Abdul Wahid to return to lead unification efforts in Jebel Marra, but that Abdul Wahid refused. The commanders confirmed that they remain united, and expected to face a GOS assault in West Jebel Marra soon. Urging the GOS to de-escalate in West Jebel Marra would buy Gaddura time; and assisting in reuniting SLA leaders would give him the political space to maneuver past Abdul Wahid. Gaddura's goals remain rebel unification and a peace deal. Given that they coincide so closely with U.S. interests in Sudan, support for Gaddura could further the effort for peace in Darfur. End Summary.

Gaddura: Unify Rebels In "Liberated Areas"

¶2. (SBU) SLA/AW General Commander Abdelgadir Abdelrahman (Gaddura) told poloff and UN representatives on October 22 that he supports rebel unification efforts, and extended an invitation to U.S. Special Envoy General Scott Gration to return to Jebel Marra. In a tightly-choreographed meeting at their headquarters in Deribat in East Jebel Marra, Gaddura and acting SLA/AW Chief of Staff Abdalla Bakr rejected the legitimacy of any conference outside of Darfur, adding that the international community must be aware that the "liberated areas" of SLA/AW are the only appropriate location for a comprehensive unification conference. They flatly declined to participate in a unification conference anywhere in Libya. "We will not unify with people who are not on the ground," Gaddura said.

¶3. (SBU) Gaddura thanked the SE for his efforts following their first meeting on April 5, 2009, in pushing for rebel unification. He asked that in dealing with the Government of Sudan (GOS), SE Gration be as neutral as possible, and continue to support the humanitarian effort in Darfur. Abdalla Bakr, clearly speaking at the behest of Gaddura, said that the movement was concerned that the United States intended to drop Sudan from the State Sponsors of Terrorism list, and improve relations with the GOS without any change in the situation on the ground in Darfur. "We are Sudanese, and for Gration to succeed, he needs to meet us, share ideas and plan together," Abdalla Bakr said.

Return Stranded Commanders from Chad to Sudan

¶ 14. (SBU) Gaddura's most pressing concern remains the return of SLA/AW commanders from N'Djamena to the field. Stranded in the Chadian capital since May, the commanders represent both field and organizational strength for the movement. Gaddura stressed that no wider SLA unification could take place until he had reunited the men under his command. (Note: Representatives from UNAMID noted that the UN could arrange transport for the commanders if the international community could persuade the GOS to permit the men to return. End note.)

JEM Holding SLA/AW Chief of Staff

¶ 15. (SBU) In addition to the return of the commanders from N'Djamena, Gaddura also asked that the international community intervene to arrange the release of SLA/AW Chief of Staff Yusuf Karjakola. SLA/AW commanders believe Khalil Ibrahim's Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) is currently holding Karjakola hostage at their base in Umm Jaras, in eastern Chad. (Note: Karjakola is a close ally of Gaddura, and he is frequently credited with maintaining the unity of SLA/AW in the field. End note.) Although the assembled rebels were tight-lipped about how Karjakola and 34 other SLA fighters fell into JEM's hands, UN officials said they believe that SLA/AW probably contacted JEM to assist in transport across the Chad-Sudan border. Given that the rebels presumably are still in JEM custody, the deal must have collapsed. (Note: Gaddura's statement of October 20 acknowledges a degree of cooperation between JEM and SLA/AW, before rejecting it. End note.) Three other rebel leaders told poloff that they had successfully traveled from N'Djamena to Jebel Marra earlier in October, but they dressed as civilians and carried no weapons with them.

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Commanders Claim SLA/AW United

¶ 16. (SBU) All of the commanders stressed that their movement remains united. But in response to a pointed question over internal division in SLA/AW, one young man spoke through his camouflaged headdress to reiterate the structured ranks of the commanders below Abdul Wahid. That remained, however, the only mention in the 90 minute-long meeting of the movement's Paris-based leader. Speaking privately with poloff following the meeting, Abdalla Bakr said that Gaddura had spoken with Abdul Wahid within the last week. Gaddura reportedly asked Abdul Wahid to return to Jebel Marra to preside over SLA unification within the "liberated areas," but Abdul Wahid flatly refused his entreaties.

SAF Ready to Strike Jebel Marra

¶ 17. (SBU) SLA/AW commanders confirmed UN reports (Septel) that the GOS appears to be readying an offensive into West Jebel Marra. According to Abdalla Bakr, SLA/AW commanders in the area near Sartony noticed significant Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) mobilization and overhead flights on October 19. In response, Gaddura sent "many men" in that direction, and although the situation was quiet on October 22, the commanders said they were prepared for the situation to escalate.

UNAMID Blamed for IDP Camp Insecurity

¶ 18. (SBU) The October 22 meeting represented the first high-level meeting since April between representatives from the United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) and Gaddura. The SLA/AW commanders heaped blame on the mission for overseeing a decline of security in the camps of Darfur's internally displaced persons (IDPs). Abdalla Bakr openly criticized UN leadership, saying "It is not true that the Sudanese military operations in Darfur are finished, as Adada said. Until now, we do not know the

positive military role of the peacekeepers." However, the commanders said they welcomed future visits by UNAMID and representatives of the diplomatic missions in Khartoum.

¶ 9. (SBU) Comment: The General Commander has, from the beginning, consistently taken the position that SLA should reunite in the liberated areas, and then negotiate for a peace deal. Still operational after five years of intermittent war, Gaddura has reached out to the international community in a show of Darfur realpolitik. Still tethered to the absent Abdul Wahid, Gaddura is facing a GOS advance on his western flank with key SLA/AW commanders unable to return to their mountain stronghold. Urging the GOS to de-escalate in West Jebel Marra would buy Gaddura time; and assisting in reuniting SLA leaders would give him the political space to maneuver past Abdul Wahid. Gaddura's goals remain rebel unification and a peace deal. Given that they coincide so closely with U.S. interests in Sudan, support for Gaddura could further the effort for peace in Darfur.

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